

More about the Elderly in Lebanon

There are in Lebanon five major institutions that take care of the aged⁽¹⁾ and three resthouses where they are accepted: one at Arayya, another at Bhannes, a third one at Zouq Musbeh (Convent of Christ King). Other new homes are being built for them: one on the hills overlooking the plain of Damour, another called Oznam House, at Batroun.

In a small, developing country like Lebanon, it is easy to explain the limited awareness of the public regarding the problems of the aged. Dr. Mounir Khoury, in his study which was published in a summarized form in the May 1982 issue of *Al-Raida*, pointed out the needs of the existing old people's homes and presented a number of recommendations concerning them.

Recently, however, some signs of a growing awareness regarding the problems of the aged have appeared. An article dealing with this topic has been published in the weekly magazine *Al-Hasna*⁽²⁾. It relates an interview made by reporter Samia al-Muhammad with Dr. Fa'ez Al-Ra'i, probably the only gerontologist in Lebanon. Moved by the glaring need for specialists in this field, he decided to act as a pioneer. For this purpose, he spent several years in France and came back with new ideas briefly expounded in the following paragraphs.

Dr. Fa'ez al-Ra'i tells us that traditional old people's homes exist no more in France (and probably in other Western countries⁽³⁾). Villages for the elderly are being built, like SOS children's villages. These resorts, which in France numbered 60 in 1975, are provided with all kinds of health installations and entertainment facilities. Their residents lead a normal home life and may receive relatives and friends whenever they please.

Dr. Ra'i is in charge of the Red Cross Outpatient Clinic for the Elderly in Jounieh, where they come for free treatment once a week. He is planning to create in Lebanon a village for them. Some religious congregations have shown their willingness to offer the land where the village would be built, but the money required for building remains to be secured. He thinks that every district in Lebanon must have its own village for the elderly and that if every Lebanese paid one pound, the project would be carried out. When asked about his opinion concerning the old people's homes in Lebanon, he said: They are crowded in almost one district of the country. Moreover, they lack the modern equipment and facilities which ensure the comfort and well-being of the aged. They look like prisons where the residents are deprived of social life and have nothing to occupy their time. That is why many of them

die soon after entering these homes. He added that in our country the idea prevails that family life is still flourishing and that the aged receive good care within their families. An inquiry he made showed that only 5 percent of the families he questioned really cared to keep their old people and give them all the care they needed. He affirms that the "times have changed"; young people are eager to lead their own independent life and are not interested in the extended family system. Many would like to send their old parents to old people's homes but are deterred by public opinion which would accuse them of ingratitude.

Anyway, says Dr. Al-Ra'i, whether the elderly remain with their families or are sent to resthouses, they need adequate medical care and a pleasant social atmosphere. If they are able to work, they should be given the opportunity to do it. The company of children will do them good and many of them should be able to take care of children at least a few hours per day. It is true that after the age of 60, there is a general decline in bodily functions, but those who keep moving and using their mental faculties will not suffer from an early decline.

In Lebanon, social security is limited to a small section of the population. We expect it to cover every individual and to include health and old age expenses. When that stage is reached, the projects that are being laid out for the elderly will be easier to carry out.

IYDP (International Year of the Disabled Persons) in Lebanon⁽¹⁾

According to a census carried out by the "Caritas" organization in 1981, there are 11,791 handicapped persons in Lebanon, of whom 9430 live in towns and 5361 in rural districts. The census was taken within a period of three and a half months between 1980 and 1981, in collaboration with school boys and girls.

The handicapped are classified as follows:

Mentally retarded	2676
insane	425
Blind	1226
Deaf and dumb	1173
Mutilated	617
Paralysed	4078
Physically malformed	463
Plurihandicapped	1133
Total	11791

(Le Réveil, 21 Dec. 1981)

(1) See *Al-Raida*, May 1, 1982, vol. V, no. 20, p.12.

(2) No. 1023, June 11-18, 1982, pp.14-18.

(3) See *Al-Raida*, Feb. 1, 1982, vol. V, no. 19, p.15.

(1) See *Al-Raida*, no. 16, May 1, 1981, vol. IV, p.5